



AZ. Auto Theft Authority News & Updates May 2010

April Showers Bring..... MAY (Free) VIN Etching Events

Saturday, May 8, 2010 - Oro Valley Police Department - 8am – 12pm - Wingate Hotel - 11075 N. Oracle Road.

Wednesday, May 12, 2010 - Phoenix Police Department - Home Depot - 36th Street & Thomas Rd. Sponsored by the Phoenix Police Dept's Central City Precinct, AATA, and Home Depot. 10% off all Home Security merchandise for duration of event.

Saturday, May 22, 2010 - Glendale Police Department - 9:30am - 12:30pm - Costco - 17550 N. 79th Avenue.

AATA Partners with AAA Arizona for May Auto Theft Prevention & VIN Etching Clinics -

This month, AATA is joining forces with AAA Arizona and local law enforcement to provide free VIN etching for vehicle windows at three AAA branch offices. This service will be provided for members by appointment at the following locations, dates and times:

*To schedule an appointment, call 602-650-2700 ext. 2261 or e-mail publicrelations@arizona.aaa.com. Each appointment should take approximately 10-15 minutes. Prior to etching, the vehicle owner must show proof of vehicle ownership, current registration and complete a consent form provided by the hosting agency.

**Non-AAA members, please call Nichole at the AATA (602 364-2889) to reserve an appointment.

Tuesday, May 18

9 a.m. to Noon
Peoria - 7422 W. Thunderbird Rd.

Wednesday, May 19

9 a.m. to Noon
Scottsdale - 14740 N. Northsight Blvd. Suite #102

Thursday, May 20

9 a.m. to Noon
Mesa - 4126 East Valley Auto Drive

The Heat is On!

With Arizona's hot summer temps right around the corner, the AATA advises all vehicle owners to perform an auto theft/burglary prevention safety check. The desire to keep vehicles cool often increases drivers' risk of becoming victims of vehicle theft. Whether it's leaving cars running for a quick stop into a convenience store or allowing vehicles to cool down unattended outside their homes, vehicle owners place themselves and property at risk for theft. The AATA recommends the following

Auto Theft & Burglary Prevention Checklist:

- Always lock car, close all windows, take keys
- Do not leave valuables in plain view -
 - Top 10 items stolen from vehicles include:**
 - 1. Stereo equipment and GPS equipment
 - 2. Compact Discs
 - 3. Personal items – clothing, sunglasses, bags, briefcases
 - 4. Coins – parking change
 - 5. Registration Papers
 - 6. Garage door openers
 - 7. Cell phone, portable DVD & MP3 players
 - 8. Work tools
 - 9. Airbags
 - 10. Tires & Wheels
- Park in high foot traffic, well lighted areas or attended lots - car thieves do not like witnesses.
- Don't leave your car running unattended, not even for a minute - convenience stores, gas stations, and ATMs are common hunting grounds for thieves.
- Don't hide a spare set of keys in the car.
- Always use your emergency brake when parking.
- If you have a garage, use it - and when you do, lock both the vehicle and the garage door.

In the News -

Major Arizona Drug Smuggling Ring Broken Up

April 27, 2010 - A drug trafficking ring that used truck-mounted ramps to get (stolen) smuggling vehicles over border fences, sophisticated counter-surveillance to avoid detection and hidden compartments in vehicles to bring at least 40,000 pounds of marijuana into the southern Arizona has been broken up, authorities said Tuesday.

The three-year investigation by federal, state and local law enforcement into the Mexican ring led to 26 suspects indicted on federal charges and 13 on state charges, said Dennis Burke, the U.S. Attorney for Arizona.

Among those arrested was an employee of the prosecutor's office in Cochise County, Ariz., who allegedly took money to feed confidential information to the ring.

The smuggling organization was likely connected to the Sinaloa Drug Cartel, Burke said. The investigation was dubbed "Operation Vaqueros" because of the cowboy attire worn the smugglers. Such clothing is typical of the Sinaloa cartel's members.

"They figured out several ways to breach the border fence," Burke said. "They were also smuggling marijuana via backpackers, so if they needed to hop (the fence) in certain places they would. They were using stolen vehicles, they were using ramping trucks. Their only limitation was their own creativity."

Twelve people identified as key players in the ring were indicted on charges of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute more than 1,000 kilograms of marijuana, a charge which carries a potential life sentence. Six of those suspects are still at large and believed to be in Mexico. The others indicted were lesser figures, typically drivers.

Federal agents obtained warrants to conduct seven wiretaps, which led to the arrest of the Cochise County Attorney's Office employee.

County Attorney Ed Rheinheimer said he was contacted by the DEA about 18 months ago telling him they had a wiretap showing a secretary in his office passing information to drug smugglers in the northern Mexican state of Sonora. The employee was a longtime resident of Naco, Ariz., who had been with the county for only a short time. He said the secretary was passing information about drug smuggling cases. She was allowed to keep working until her arrest in January as the investigation progressed.

Keeping employees from being corrupted by smugglers is a major worry, Rheinheimer said.

"It's a concern within the police departments, it's a concern among the municipalities, at the county level, at the state and at the federal, because the financial stakes are so high in both the drug smuggling trade and the people smuggling trade that the temptations can be overwhelming," Rheinheimer said. "We know that occasionally someone will succumb to the temptation."

Most of the pot was brought into Cochise County, which is a hub for drug and human smuggling. The slaying of a local rancher in March, possibly by a drug smuggler or an illegal immigrant, brought nationwide attention to the area and helped spur the passage of a tough new Arizona law cracking down on illegal immigration.

The investigation began in 2007 after U.S. Border Patrol agents became aware of the sophisticated smuggling efforts employed by the ring in southeastern Arizona's Cochise County, which has a long border with Mexico. Eventually, the investigation also involved officers from the DEA, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, FBI, Arizona Department of Public Safety, Cochise County Sheriff and local police in Bisbee, Douglas, and Sierra Vista.

Such coordinated efforts are critical because it allows more officers to be brought to bear on large, sophisticated smuggling rings, Burke said.

"It took us time to break down all their tactics and strategies, their techniques," Burke said. "And it's going to have a ripple effect on other drug trafficking organizations, because now they know we've figured out many of their methods."



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